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THE NEW ENGLAND ENTRANCE CERTIFICATE BOARD FROM THE STANDPOINT OF SCHOOLS.

THE restrictions placed upon the discussion by the title of the paper are easily seen. To define my position more clearly, however, I wish to say that I speak from the standpoint of the public high schools only, using the term in its commonly accepted sense: schools maintained at public cost, or under public control, or both.

The relation between the high school and the college has never been satisfactory, and the unsatisfactoriness has arisen from the double function which the school has been compelled to fulfil. From this has also come the difficulty which the school has had in accommodating itself to the requirement of the college without impairing its other function; and since this second function—meeting the demands of those who do not go to college—is daily growing in importance, the difficulty of the accommodation and the unsatisfactoriness of the relation are likely to increase rather than diminish. As an indication of this, one has only to observe the tendency of the larger and better high schools to make separate courses, in whole or in part, for their college-preparatory pupils, and the devices to which the smaller schools are driven to prevent the college-preparatory part of their work from interfering with the other, larger, and more important part.

In the relation of school to college the method of admission to college has played its part. The two methods in vogue are entrance by certificate and by examination, some colleges using one, and others, both. Until recently three New England colleges admitted only by examination; at present only two—Harvard and Yale. Neither method, as administered, has been satisfactory, but which has been the more unsatisfactory it would be hard to say. On the one hand, admission by examination has had the advantage of enabling the colleges adhering to it to control their own intake absolutely, but the disadvantage of compelling them to acknowledge the inefficiency of their own plan to obtain properly prepared students, or the insufficiency of their own instruction to secure the proper amount

of work from them in college. On the other hand, admission by certificate has been disadvantageous to the colleges, because by it they did not control their intake, but advantageous in that it enabled them to throw back upon the schools all responsibility for failure, on the students' part, after admission. The condition of the schools under either system has been that of the patients in the days when appendicitis became the fad. It was common to see in the papers some such item as this: "Dr. B. performed a very skilful and successful operation yesterday upon Mr. X. for appendicitis;" and when you began to wonder how matters were with Mr. X., you could generally read farther on: "but the patient was not able to rally from the shock. Notice of the funeral later." It would be hardly fair, however, to say that in the matter of admission to college the school has had *no* consideration at all, and yet one can scarcely escape that conclusion.

With a discussion of the entrance-examination system or of its ignominious failure I am not now concerned, and yet I wish to say, in passing, that it seems to me fundamentally vicious: (1) because its tendency is to direct all preparatory teaching, not toward mastery of subject, not toward clear and honest thinking, not toward the scholarly spirit, but, primarily if not wholly, toward the acquirement of the ability to answer, in a fixed time, certain limitedly variable questions, more or less remotely connected with the work the applicants are supposed to have done; (2) because it encourages in pupils the belief that diligent "cramming," not diligent study, is the prime prerequisite to entrance into college; and (3) because it introduces the element of gambling into educational work and—in the minds of students—reduces what ought to be noble endeavor and fine acquirement to a game of dice.

The certificate system, too, has failed; otherwise, why the formation of the New England College Entrance Board? Therefore, before speaking of the board, it will be well to spend a short time on the New England college-certificate system in order to see what it is that has failed. For years we have been familiar with the reading in the college catalogues to the effect that certificate privilege would be granted to schools on certain conditions more or less onerous, and that the privilege would be taken away if the students admitted under it

did not maintain a standing in scholarship satisfactory to the college, and the school be reduced to its former condition of vassalage under the examination system. It was further stated, in some catalogues, that the college withheld some study or studies from the certificate privilege, admitting pupils upon these by examination only. Upon a few studies the conditions for obtaining the privilege were made so burdensome and vexatious that few schools cared to comply with them. On the above it must be observed that the colleges set all the conditions; that they did not make any effort to inform themselves about the schools; that in some cases they demanded two kinds of preparation, fundamentally different, of the same pupil; that they so increased the requirement in some studies that a separate and special announcement concerning certificate privilege upon these studies was necessary; that they threw all the burden of the pupil's failure to maintain a satisfactory standing in scholarship upon the school; and that they condemned the school, suffering the loss of the certificate privilege, to a return to the system they themselves had abandoned as the worse of the two systems in vogue.

A few words need next to be said on the *forms* of the college-entrance certificate. As no two are alike, the salient features of all may, with care, be put in one. The number of pages in one of these documents ranges from two to twenty, and a great deal of information is usually called for. First come the name and location of the school; its kind—male, female, or mixed; the name of the principal, sex, college and degree; the name of the candidate, sex; and other items of interest or service to the certificate committee. Second comes the choice of course to which the candidate is to be recommended. If classical, then I, II, part of III, a little of V, and the last third of VII; if scientific, you begin at VII, and go back to I; and if literary, you begin in the middle and work both ways. Perhaps the new arrangements into groups and majors, minors, and elementaries has been adopted, and you have the old puzzle with variations. But the real refinement of execution comes when you turn the leaf and get down to detail. For a sample take the questions about the preparation in French, and suppose it is a major, which, the catalogue says, must have three years' time, forty weeks in the year, five periods in the week, fifty minutes to the period; must cover a

reading of 1,500 to 2,500 duodecimo pages from such and such authors or books, or their like; must induce an ability to write, speak, and understand French readily—quality not mentioned—for which a certain number of exercises, all conducted in French, are necessary, and that even then you are not to be too sure about your candidate's sustaining himself; take all these items together, and you have a possibility for questions quite entrancing. And the possibility is always fully measured up to. When the eight, ten, or twelve studies have been filled out after the above fashion, then comes the signature of all the teachers whom the applicant has had during his four years or more in the school, and as they are not always at hand, and you desire to be accommodating, you use the mails diligently for a week or two, if he is still living. Last of all comes your affidavit that you haven't, to the best of your knowledge, told any lies, and the document, too, is ready for its taking off.

One point more remains to be touched upon—the character of the instruction the student is to receive when he first enters college. A careful and wise high-school principal puts over his entering class, as far as possible, his best and most skilful teachers, so that the newcomers may be inducted into the unaccustomed ways of work and study by the wisest hands possible. Something of that kind, it seems to me, is due the entering class at college, coming, as it does, from all sorts of school opportunities into a totally new life and different ways of study; and I have always felt like adding to my certification of a pupil's fitness the words "with the kind of instruction he is entitled to receive." I do not know what the *general* practice of the colleges is in this matter, but I do know that some college professors deny all obligation to give instruction; and all of us easily remember how the entering class is too often left to the unwisdom of the youth fresh from his college swaddling-bands, to the desiccated humanity of the enthusiastic specialist, or to the tender mercies of the stern *breaker-in* of callow youth. There seems to be a growing indisposition on the part of college instructors to put themselves out of their routine in order to be helpful to the students as individuals, and, concurrent with that indisposition, a growing feeling that the college exists for the instructors and not for the students. (On this point I read with great interest pp. 8 and 9 of the recent report of the president of

Harvard College.) All this bears heavily upon the schools, for it is so easy for the college to attribute the failure of the student entirely to lack of preparation. In thus asking for justice to the schools and consideration for the student just entering college, I do not wish to be understood as desiring less rigor in the college demands. It is not less rigor, but rigor accompanied by the remembrance that the student is an individual human being still in need of instruction, for which I am pleading.

Such, in brief, is the certificate system *devised* and *operated* by the colleges of New England. It has failed; but the failure is not fundamental, as that of the entrance-examination system is, because the certificate system is, fundamentally, a right system. The failure has been one of administration or operation, and in the following respects: (1) It has not been an out-and-out certificate system, but a sort of half-way substitute for entrance by examination; (2) the penalty for abuse of the certificate privilege by the schools has been wrong in principle and weak in enforcement; (3) the form of the certificate has generally assumed the probability of dishonesty, or incapacity for competent judgment on the part of the schools; and (4) the schools apparently have been considered as institutions not having interests mutual and reciprocal with those of the colleges. Perhaps, if I may venture to say it, a lurking feeling in the minds of the schools of the presence of a strong desire on the part of the colleges to extend the sphere of their own influence, and an extreme reluctance to lessen that sphere in any way, might be assigned as another cause for the failure of the certificate system in New England.

Be all these things as they may, there is no doubt of the failure of the system, and to remedy, or at least to discuss, that failure the Certificate Board, now including all the colleges of New England outside of Vermont, except Yale, Harvard, Williams, Trinity, and Colby, was organized in 1902. When the schools first heard of the formation of the board, they began to hope that, at last, the present system of entrance to college by certificate in New England was to be thoroughly renovated, and that much that the colleges had been unable to do, acting separately, they would now be able to carry out acting together. It was, therefore, with some not unmixed curiosity that they awaited the declaration of the purpose of the board, which

appeared in due time, and which is wholly contained in the following words, quoted from the first by-law: "This board is established for the purpose of receiving, examining, and acting upon all applications of schools that ask for the privilege of certification." Only this and nothing more! To receive, examine, and act upon all applications for certificate *privilege!* The same old, tattered system, but some new way of getting into it, perhaps! In much disappointment, and with some feeling of uncertainty, the schools could only await the publication of the first report, which came in the opening months of 1904.

A careful examination of this report, and of the principles and rules of the board printed in it, fails to reveal anything affecting the schools in the new plan, that was not, substantially, in the old, except the *board*. It will be worth while to spend a few minutes in verifying this statement, and I take first the principles:

1. All applications shall be presented in writing.
2. Certificates from an approved school, covering the requirement of one college, are not necessarily receivable at another.
3. Approval may be withdrawn from a school.
4. Reports from the colleges to the board about the work of pupils from approved schools, and complaints about insufficient preparation, shall not interfere with reports and complaints to the schools from the individual colleges.
7. The list of approved schools shall be revised every three years, and all schools cut off that have sent no pupils to any of the colleges represented.

Under the rules I find the following, not already quoted from the principles:

4. No school shall be placed on the list unless it can prepare for some one of the colleges represented on the board.
5. No school will be approved unless it has shown, by the record of students already admitted to college, its ability to give thorough preparation for college.

The above are all the provisions in the new system that affect the schools, and upon them I have a few remarks to offer. The fourth principle states explicitly that the information upon which the board will act in deciding the continuance of the certificate privilege to any school will come from the college entertaining the student at the time, and will consist of an *ex parte* statement of that student's work for at least one-third of his first year in college. That a student's ability to sustain himself or the fitness of his preparation

can be tested, with fairness to anyone concerned, in the first third of his freshman year, I very much doubt.

Principle 7 says: "If a school is once approved, and for three consecutive years sends all its pupils to colleges not represented on the board, it shall be cut off from certificate privilege;" the board, not being willing to continue its protection longer than three years over schools in no way responsible to it.

Rule 4 says a school shall not be approved unless it can prepare for some one of the colleges represented, and inserts the words "according to some of the recognized plans of *entering*." Does the board mean *plan* or *method*? Do the colleges lay down *plans of preparation* by which the schools are to be guided, and are such plans to be found in the printed catalogues? At best, the meaning is ambiguous. It may refer, of course, to the puzzle of choosing the course from "groups," etc., mentioned above. If it means that it is harmless but unnecessary, for it is hard to see how a school could prepare a student for entrance to a college without doing it as the college required. If it does not mean this, and does not mean that the schools are to be further burdened with instructions as to their plan of preparation, we shall probably have to wait till the next annual report of the board to have the matter cleared up.

In all this business I see thus far on the part of the colleges no sign of repentance, no sorrow for sins committed, no evidence of consciousness of offense. The schools, though almost wholly guiltless, are treated throughout as the only culprit. They had hoped something would be done for their help and relief. But not a single abuse is corrected, not a single burden lifted. Instead, the little finger of the new threatens to become thicker than the loins of the old. For the real trouble has not been touched, and never can be by any such device as the formation of a board, or by any other that is chiefly concerned with the sins of others. The reform must begin where the trouble began—with the colleges—and must be a real reform.

Two influences have been actively operative the past fifteen years to bring about the present condition in schools and colleges: first, an ardent desire on the part of the colleges to become universities; and, concurrent with that, an itch on the part of instructors—even in the

schools—to get away from what they called the *drudgery* of educational work, and to sit in the lecturer's seat. The effect upon the schools, with which I am now concerned, I shall try to describe. First there was a great demand for numbers, and the school, with a new air of importance, responded. As a result, entrance to college was made easier by lowering the quality of the requirement to suit the new demand for numbers. If that had been all, when the time for retracing the downward step came, it could have been done. But as the university showed signs of budding, the second influence began to operate, and more and more of the work formerly done by the college was put back upon the school. With the process we all are acquainted. First one instructor demanded an advance in the requirement in his department, then another, each one refraining from objection because he was awaiting his turn. The first influence degraded the quality of the requirement, the second greatly enlarged the quantity of it. Then devices began to be suggested to the schools as to how they might make the quality of their work better without decreasing the quantity. We are all familiar with the talk of pushing down into the grades this and that study—enriching the grades, it is called; of lengthening the high-school course to six years; of hastening the young man into life by shortening his course; and all this without reducing the requirement, etc., *ad nauseam*. It is all of one piece, and in it all some very important things have been forgotten. Let me mention a few: (1) the quality of teaching the public schools can command without a much greater outlay of money than is now made; (2) the increased expenditure of public money involved in a longer high-school course, which affects only the few; (3) the youth himself. These are all fundamental, and any scheme that leaves out any one of them seems to me extremely foolish. I have faith to believe that better-paid teachers and better opportunities for good teaching will come in time, but very slowly. The lengthening of the high-school course has so many good reasons against it, and is, on the whole, so unnecessary, that it need not, for the present, be considered. My belief on both these is based on my still stronger belief in the good sense of the people who have to furnish the taxes. The third forgotten element, the youth himself, improves very slowly, and any scheme of education that forgets this is likely to come to

grief. At present, considering all things, he is crowded far beyond his powers of digestion and assimilation, and will be a stubborn obstacle, for perhaps eons, to well-meant but unwise attempts toward too much enrichment. I confess myself frankly in sympathy with him.

This seems to me to be the present situation of the high schools and colleges in New England. Into this situation the Entrance Certificate Board has come with a great opportunity before it—an opportunity that involves the whole relation of the high schools and colleges of New England, and which, if rightly and wisely taken, will determine, for many years, the work of these institutions in the general scheme of education. The hope of the schools that the board will give its largest thought to the solution of this problem is based on their sense of need of the help that the colleges can and ought to give. This need may be suggested as follows: (1) A closer mutual acquaintance of the schools and colleges, involving a knowledge of the demands upon them, conditions of work, and purposes of each. (2) An early realization on the part of the colleges, that, except for a very few exceptionally favored schools, the entrance requirement is too great in quantity, and that the quality of the work cannot be materially raised if the quantity is not materially lessened. The college complains—and rightly—that the students come to them untaught to think or to work. To learn to do either takes time, of which the schools have scant supply, with the vast areas of matter to be gone over. The schools ask this in their own behalf as well as for the sake of the colleges, believing that less matter, with more rigorous demands in the quality of the work, would be infinitely better for all concerned. (3) Along with the freer opportunity of the certificate, greater rigor, on the part of the colleges, in the administration of the penalties for poor or dishonest work, and, concurrent with this, a more painstaking care, if possible, with the individual at the beginning of his college course.

The schools do not undervalue their obligation to the colleges, with whose life, in a sense, their life is bound up. They desire not to overrate the importance of their own position in the scheme of general education. They believe that any diminution of the influ-

ence of the college in American education would be nothing less than a disaster, and that anything that tends to make the relation of the high schools and colleges more intimate and more satisfactory is worthy the most serious consideration of thoughtful men.

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